

**METHOD, APPARATUS AND COMPUTER PROGRAM PRODUCT FOR
IMPLEMENTING LEVEL BIAS FUNCTION FOR BRANCH PREDICTION
CONTROL FOR GENERATING TEST SIMULATION VECTORS**

Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates generally to the data processing field, and more particularly, relates to a method, apparatus and computer program product for implementing a level bias function for branch prediction control for generating test simulation vectors.

Description of the Related Art

10 Computer simulation of digital hardware systems has become a common technique used for the design of microprocessor systems, reducing cost and time required. A verification test suite typically used for this purpose include, for example, various functional patterns or simulation vectors which together comprise a representative sample of typical operating instructions or programs that are likely to execute on a microprocessor. The test suite may include simulation vectors that approximate the typical operation of the device such that average operating conditions are reflected.

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When generating test simulation vectors of branch conditional instructions, it is difficult to reliably predict whether a branch will be taken, or not taken. Instructions are fetched and completed sequentially until a control or branch instruction alters the instruction flow, either conditionally or unconditionally. A control instruction specifies a new memory location from which to begin fetching instructions. When a fetch unit receives a

conditional branch operation and the data upon which the condition is based is not yet available, for example, the instruction that will produce the necessary data has not been executed, fetch unit may use one or more branch prediction mechanisms in branch prediction control unit to predict the outcome of the condition. Control is then speculatively altered until the results of the condition can be determined. If the branch was correctly predicted, operation continues. If the prediction was incorrect, all instructions along the speculative path are canceled or flushed. Since speculative instructions cannot complete until the branch condition is resolved, many high performance out-of-order processors provide a mechanism to map physical registers to virtual registers. The result of execution is written to the virtual register when the instruction has finished executing. Physical registers are not updated until an instruction actually completes. Any instructions dependent upon the results of a previous instruction may begin execution as soon as the virtual register is written. In this way, a long stream of speculative instructions can be executed before determining the outcome of the conditional branch.

Known solutions for generating test simulation vectors of branch conditional instructions require manually initializing resources used by the branch instructions to predict a branch while at the same time using the initialized resources for both hard coding the branch operands and setting control bits used by software accordingly. This is problematic because the resources that are initialized may change prior to the branch instruction causing the hard coded test cases to become invalid and unreliable.

A need exists for an improved mechanism for branch prediction control in modeling test simulation vectors.

Summary of the Invention

A principal object of the present invention is to provide a method, apparatus and computer program product for implementing a level bias function for branch prediction control for generating test simulation vectors. Other important objects of the present invention are to provide such a method, apparatus and computer program product for implementing a level bias function for branch prediction control for generating test simulation

vectors substantially without negative effect and that overcome many of the disadvantages of prior art arrangements.

In brief, a method, apparatus and computer program product are provided for implementing a level bias function for branch prediction control for generating test simulation vectors. User selected options are received for a set of constraints for generating test simulation vectors for branch conditional instructions. Current resource values for predicting a branch for a branch conditional instruction are read. A branch operand field is generated to include a set of valid values using the current resource values and based upon said user selected constraints. The branch operand field defines conditions under which a branch is taken.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The present invention together with the above and other objects and advantages may best be understood from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention illustrated in the drawings, wherein:

FIGS. 1A and 1B are block diagram representations illustrating a computer system and operating system for implementing a level bias function for branch prediction control in accordance with the preferred embodiment;

FIG. 2 is a diagram illustrating exemplary branch operand field encoding for implementing a level bias function for branch prediction control in accordance with the preferred embodiment;

FIGS. 3, 4, 5, and 6 are logical flow diagrams illustrating exemplary operations for implementing a level bias function for branch prediction control in accordance with the preferred embodiment; and

FIG. 7 is a block diagram illustrating a computer program product in accordance with the preferred embodiment.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

Referring now to the drawings, in FIGS. 1A and 1B there is shown a computer system generally designated by the reference character 100 for implementing a level bias function for branch prediction control in accordance with the preferred embodiment. Computer system 100 includes

5 a main processor 102 or central processor unit (CPU) 102 coupled by a system bus 106 to a memory management unit (MMU) 108 and system memory including a dynamic random access memory (DRAM) 110, a nonvolatile random access memory (NVRAM) 112, and a flash memory 114.

10 A mass storage interface 116 coupled to the system bus 106 and MMU 108 connects a direct access storage device (DASD) 118 and a CD-ROM drive 120 to the main processor 102. Computer system 100 includes a display interface 122 connected to a display 124, and a network interface 126 coupled to the system bus 106.

Computer system 100 is shown in simplified form sufficient for
15 understanding the present invention. The illustrated computer system 100 is not intended to imply architectural or functional limitations. The present invention can be used with various hardware implementations and systems and various other internal hardware devices, for example, multiple main processors.

20 As shown in FIG. 1B, computer system 100 includes an operating system 130, a testcase simulation vector generator 132 including a level bias function 134 of the preferred embodiment, and a user interface 136. Resources used by branch instructions to predict a branch include a count register (CTR) 138 and a branch condition register 140. A plurality of fields
25 of the branch condition register 140 include a pair of branch operand fields BO 142, BI 144, and a target address 146 specifying the branch target address. Encoding 200 of the operand field BO 142 is illustrated in FIG. 2.

The branch conditional instructions use the operands BO 142, BI 144 to define the type of branch to be taken or not taken. The BO operand 142 is used to define the conditions under which a branch is taken.
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A pair of bits referred to as a 'A' and 'T' bits within the BO operand 142, AT bits 148, are used for prediction by testcase simulation vector generator 132 to provide a hint about whether the branch is likely to be taken

or is likely not to be taken. The AT bits 148 are defined as follows:

BITS	DEFINITION
AT	Hint
00	No hint is given
5 01	Reserved
10	The branch is very likely not to be taken
11	The branch is very likely to be taken

10 The condition specified by the BO operand 142 may indicate to read
the count register (CTR) 138, the condition register (CR) 140, both, or
neither. If BO 142 indicates to read the CR 140, the BI operand 144 of the
branch conditional instruction indicates which bit in the CR 140 to read.
Based on the value of these resources, the AT bits 148 within the BO
operand 142 are set to provide a hint as to the outcome of the branch. The
AT bits 142 are not used for every condition the BO operand 142 may
represent.

20 In accordance with features of the preferred embodiment, an operand
level bias or level bias function134 is introduced on the branch conditional
instructions. This level bias function134 of the preferred embodiment reads
the resources necessary to predict a branch at the time of the branch
conditional instruction. Level bias function134 creates valid masks for the
branch operands BO 142, BI 144 to correctly predict or mis-predict the
branch. Advantages of using the use of level bias function function134 of
the preferred embodiment are that in all test cases it is possible to reliably
predict whether or not a branch will be taken, and the need to rely on any
25 hard coded values as used in the past is eliminated.

30 In accordance with features of the preferred embodiment, the user
generating the branch instruction is presented with a bias to control the value
of the BO operand 142. These user selected options presented via user
interface 136 are:

30 1) Branch taken -- the percentage of time to take the branch
 100% = branch always taken
 0% = branch is never taken

2) Prediction -- the percentage of time to predict a branch
100% = always create a BO field which uses the AT bits, and
always set the AT bits to 10 or 11.
5 0% = never create a BO field which uses AT bits, or create a
BO field which uses the AT bits, but set the AT bits to
00
3) Accuracy -- the percentage of time our AT settings are correct
100% = when predicting (see # 2 above) the AT settings
created are always correct
10 0% = when predicting (see # 2 above) the AT settings will
never be correct.

Referring now to FIG. 2, there are shown exemplary encoding 200 of the operand field BO 142 for implementing a level bias function for branch prediction control in accordance with the preferred embodiment. The "a" and "t" bits in the illustrated operand BO 142 represent AT bits 148 as defined above and shown in FIG. 1B, and "z" represents a bit that is ignored. The illustrated entries or conditions of operand BO 142 labeled A-I are used in the flowcharts of FIGS. 3, 4, 5, and 6.

In accordance with features of the preferred embodiment, the process implemented by level bias function 134 on the branch conditional instructions starts with a universal set of values for the branch conditional BO field 142, as illustrated by conditions A-I in FIG. 2. Then the branch conditional BO field 142 is reduced to a set of valid values. These valid values satisfy constraints set by the user based on the current state of the machine. The branch conditional BO field 142 is generated for the branch conditional instruction, values of the CTR 138 and CR 140 are read. Using the current value of the resources CTR 138 and CR 140 along with the current value of the BI operand 144, a mask is returned of all possible valid values for the BO operand 140 based on the user's input.

30 Referring to FIGS. 3, 4, 5, and 6, there are shown exemplary operations for implementing a level bias function for branch prediction control in accordance with the preferred embodiment. The flowcharts of FIGS. 3, 4, 5, and 6 refer to the exemplary conditions A-I shown in FIG. 2 and the constraint 1) percentage of time branch should be taken; constraint

2) the percentage of time branch should be predicted; and constraint 3) the percentage of time the AT settings 148 are correct or the accuracy of the prediction are respectively referred to generally as branch taken, accuracy and prediction settings or branch predicted, and prediction accurate.

5 Referring now to FIG. 3, there is shown an overview of exemplary operations of the level bias function 134 for branch prediction control for generating test simulation vectors of the preferred embodiment. The operant BI field 144 is read as indicated in a block 300. Then the value of BO 142 is reduced based upon the BI operand 144 as illustrated and described with respect to FIG. 4 as indicated in a block 302. The count register (CTR) 138 is read as indicated in a block 304. Then the value of BO 142 is reduced based upon the CTR 138 as illustrated and described with respect to FIG. 5 as indicated in a block 306. Then the value of BO 142 is reduced based upon accuracy and predicted settings as illustrated and described with respect to FIG. 6 as indicated in a block 308. Checking for the branch taken is performed as indicated in a decision block 310. If the branch was not taken, then condition I is removed from the BO 142 as indicated in a block 312. Otherwise, if the branch was taken, then the reduced set of BO 142 values is returned as indicated in a block 314.

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20 Referring now to FIG. 4, there is shown exemplary operations of the process at block 302 of FIG. 3 to reduce the value of BO 142 based upon the BI operand 144. The branch condition register (CR) 140 is read as indicated in a block 400. Checking whether the BI operand 144 equals one is performed as indicated in a decision block 402. If the BI operand 144 does not equal one, then checking for branch taken is performed as indicated in a decision block 404. Then if the branch was taken conditions D, E, F are removed from BO 142 as indicated in a block 406. Otherwise, if the branch was not taken, conditions A, B, C are removed from BO 142 as indicated in a block 408. If the BI operand 144 equals one at decision block 402, then checking for branch taken is performed as indicated in a decision block 410. If the branch was not taken at decision block 410, then conditions D, E, F are removed from BO 142 at block 406. If the branch was taken at decision block 410, then conditions A, B, C are removed from BO 142 at block 408. Then after D, E, F are removed from BO 142 at block 406, or conditions A, B, C are removed from BO 142 at block 408, the operations

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return as indicated in a block 412.

Referring now to FIG. 5, there is shown exemplary operations of the process at block 306 of FIG. 3 to reduce the value of BO 142 based upon the CTR 138. Checking whether CTR decremented by one equals zero is
5 performed as indicated in a decision block 500. If the CTR - 1 does not equal zero, then checking for branch taken is performed as indicated in a decision block 502. Then if the branch was taken, conditions B, E, H are removed from BO 142 as indicated in a block 504. Otherwise, if the branch was not taken, conditions A, D, G are removed from BO 142 as indicated in
10 a block 506. If the CTR decremented by one equals zero at decision block 500, then checking for branch taken is performed as indicated in a decision block 508. If the branch was not taken at decision block 508, then conditions B, E, H are removed from BO 142 at block 504. If the branch was taken at decision block 508, then conditions A, D, G are removed from BO
15 142 at block 506. Then after conditions B, E, H are removed from BO 142 at block 504, or conditions A, D, G are removed from BO 142 at block 506, the operations return as indicated in a block 510.

Referring now to FIG. 6, there is shown exemplary operations of the process at block 308 of FIG. 3 to reduce the value of BO 142 based upon accuracy and predicted setting. Checking whether the branch was predicted is performed as indicated in a decision block 600. If the branch was not predicted, then conditions C, F, G, H are removed from BO 142 where AT bits 144 equal 01 or 11 as indicated in a block 602. If the branch was predicted, then checking whether the prediction was accurate is performed
20 as indicated in a decision block 604. If the prediction was not accurate, checking for branch taken is performed as indicated in a decision block 606. Then if the branch was taken, all conditions except for conditions C, F, G, H, are removed from BO 142 where AT bits 144 equal 01 as indicated in a
25 block 608. Otherwise, if the branch was not taken, all conditions except for conditions C, F, G, H are removed from BO 142 where AT bits 144 equal 11 as indicated in a block 610. If the prediction was accurate at decision block 604, then checking for branch taken is performed as indicated in a decision block 612. If the branch was not taken at decision block 508, then all
30 conditions except for conditions C, F, G, H, are removed from BO 142 where AT bits 144 equal 01 at block 608. If the branch was taken at decision block 612, then all conditions except for conditions C, F, G, H, are removed from BO 142 where AT bits 144 equal 11 at block 610. If the prediction was not accurate at decision block 604, then checking for branch taken is performed as indicated in a decision block 612. If the branch was not taken at decision block 508, then all
35 conditions except for conditions C, F, G, H, are removed from BO 142 where AT bits 144 equal 01 at block 608. If the branch was taken at decision block 612, then all conditions except for conditions C, F, G, H, are removed from BO 142 where AT bits 144 equal 11 at block 610.

612, then all conditions except for conditions C, F, G, H, are removed from BO 142 where AT bits 144 equal 11 at block 608. Then after the respective conditions are removed from BO 142 at one of the blocks 602, 608, or 610, then operations return as indicated in a block 614.

5 Referring now to FIG. 7, an article of manufacture or a computer program product 700 of the invention is illustrated. The computer program product 700 includes a recording medium 702, such as, a floppy disk, a high capacity read only memory in the form of an optically read compact disk or CD-ROM, a tape, a transmission type media such as a digital or analog communications link, or a similar computer program product. Recording medium 702 stores program means 704, 706, 708, 710 on the medium 702 for carrying out the methods for implementing a level bias function for branch prediction control for generating test simulation vectors of the preferred embodiment in the system 100 of FIG. 1.

10 A sequence of program instructions or a logical assembly of one or more interrelated modules defined by the recorded program means 704, 706, 708, 710, direct the computer system 100 for implementing a level bias function for branch prediction control for generating test simulation vectors of the preferred embodiment.

15 While the present invention has been described with reference to the details of the embodiments of the invention shown in the drawing, these details are not intended to limit the scope of the invention as claimed in the appended claims.